

taking the lead for the security, creating the conditions for the phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq. The Levin amendment builds on this approach.

The White House should follow this principle as well. Visiting Iraq for a few hours cannot resuscitate or justify a failed policy. No amount of spin or photo opportunities can change the bottom line: this war has been poorly conceived and poorly managed by the White House, and that is why it has been so poorly received by the American people.

And it is troubling to already see Karl Rove in New Hampshire, treating this as a political attack opportunity instead of a major national challenge around which to rally the country.

There are no easy answers to this war. I understand that many Americans want to see our troops come home. The chaos, violence, and horrors in Iraq are gut-wrenching reminders of what our men and women in uniform, some just months out of high school, must confront on a daily basis. They are doing this heroically, they are doing this selflessly, and more than 2,500 of them have now made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Not one of us wants to see our servicemen and women in harm's way a day longer than they have to be. And that's why we must find the most responsible way to bring them home as quickly as possible, while still leaving the foundation of a secure Iraq that will not endanger the free world.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized. The Senator has 14 minutes 47 seconds remaining.

Mr. LEVIN. I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Illinois.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is time for American troops to come home. That was the judgment of the Senate last year. Last year, by a vote of 79 to 19, we adopted on a bipartisan basis an amendment written largely by the Senator from Michigan but amended and then cosponsored by the Senator from Virginia. It was a bipartisan amendment.

By 79 to 19, we said last year that this year would be different. This just would not be another year, it would be a year of significant transition, and we were specific about what that transition meant. It meant that the Iraqis would be moving toward control of their own nation. It meant that their forces would take the lead. Those were our words—"take the lead"—in defending their country. It meant that we would create the condition for phased redeployment—that is, withdrawal of U.S. forces. That is how we voted last year, 79 to 19.

Today, we are now debating again whether American forces can start to come home. I thought we already decided that last year, that this would be

the year when they start to come home.

Senator LEVIN brings an amendment to the Senate and says again, as we did last year, we will start redeploying or withdrawing American forces this year. What do we hear from the other side of the aisle? The same Republicans, many of whom voted to start bringing troops home this year, now resist the idea.

Is that because Iraq is stronger today? Unfortunately, the statistics do not suggest it. The news reports from the New York Times tells us in May 2003, there were five recorded incidents of sectarian violence. In May of 2004, 10; in May of 2005, 20; in May of 2006, 250.

To suggest that Iraq is stronger this year, a year later, is at least subject to debate. But this much we do know: We know we are paying a price every single day. The heartbreaking newscasts we listen to are of our men and women, our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters who continue to die in Iraq, as they simply drive their vehicles down the road or stand and guard a security installation, 2,508 of our best and bravest who have died.

The obvious question is, When will this end? The Bush administration, what plan do they have? No end in sight for the way they view it. I listened to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle say the Iraqis will take control in the future. This is the fourth year we have been told that the Iraqis will stand up and defend their own country. We are told they have 260,000 soldiers and police prepared to defend their own country, ready to fight.

You know when I will believe that? When the first American soldier comes home, replaced by an Iraqi soldier. That has not happened yet. We are about to send 21,000 more American soldiers over to fight in rotation to keep 130,000 on the ground. If these Iraqi forces are so well trained and so well prepared, why are we sending another 21,000? I don't think we can explain that.

I think we know what this is about. We are facing a situation in Iraq today where the Iraqis have the wrong message from America. The Iraqis believe that they can wait, patiently wait, until the day comes when they defend their own country.

And why not? They have the best military in the world, the American military, in place defending their country. They have the American taxpayers paying for that defense. They understand we are prepared to invest those resources, and they think it will be indefinite. Nothing we are going to do on the floor of this U.S. Senate will change that point of view, unless we adopt the Levin amendment which says we will begin to withdraw the forces, redeploy the forces, this year.

There has been a lot of criticism on the floor that the party on the other side of the aisle, the Republicans, is all unified and the Democrats cannot seem to all agree on anything. I do not know

what the vote will be on the Levin amendment. I think it will be a substantial vote within the Democratic caucus. But our critics are wrong.

Mr. President, 100 percent of the Democratic caucus believes it is time for change. And 100 percent of the Republican caucus believes it is time to stay the course, not change. They stand unified for the premise that we will not demand accountability. They stand unified for the premise that we will not have any change.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. I think the American people understand, as we do, that it is time for us to say to the Iraqis: Stand and defend your own nation. Let American soldiers start coming home.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask, how many minutes remain?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Nine minutes 14 seconds.

Mr. LEVIN. I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, I yield 4 minutes to the Senator from Rhode Island, my cosponsor, Mr. REED.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized for 4 minutes.

Mr. REED. Thank you, Mr. President.

There are two key elements in the Levin-Reed amendment. The first is to begin redeployment, this year, of American combat forces in Iraq. So many of my colleagues have mentioned Mr. Rubaie, who is the National Security Adviser for the Iraqi Government. On two occasions he has said it is not only feasible but desirable. He said it first on television, and then he said it just this week in a carefully crafted editorial. So this is something that I think can be done, and, according to a key leader in the Iraq Government, should be done.

The second element is that the President should submit to Congress a plan by the end of 2006, with estimated dates for the continued phased redeployments of U.S. forces from Iraq, with the understanding that unexpected contingencies may arise. The President should do this with the understanding that unexpected contingencies may arise.

This has been referred to as an arbitrary timetable. It is not arbitrary, and it is not a timetable. It is not a timetable of our creation, but it would be of the President. So do, I assume, those who object to this feel that the President could not produce such a timetable? Or if he did produce such a timetable, it would be arbitrary, that it would be made without consultation with our military leaders, that it would be made without reference to conditions on the ground? I do not think so. In fact, I think such a timetable would be appropriate and necessary.

Also, I should point out that our amendment recognizes the residual